

Lawn Service Contracts

Growing a green lawn takes time and energy. These days, some people prefer hiring lawn care services to take over a large part of the effort.

Lawn care services perform some of the time-consuming and complicated tasks of lawn maintenance. These may include analyzing, fertilizing, and seeding the soil; controlling and killing weeds and pests; and caring for trees and shrubs. These services may be provided an average of four to five times during the spring through fall. You also may want these firms to regularly mow and water your lawn.

Sometimes, in order to hire these companies, you must sign expensive and long-term contracts. It is important, therefore, to know exactly what you want from a lawn care firm. The following information may help you decide whether to hire a lawn care service and, if so, how to find the one right for you.

How do you choose a lawn care service?

If you decide you want to hire a lawn care service, you may want to consider the following suggestions.

- Talk with others in your neighborhood who have used lawn care services. Find out which companies have done a good job and why.
- Talk with representatives from several lawn care firms and get estimates. The lowest estimate may not necessarily provide all the services you need.
- Remember that each lawn is different and that your lawn does not necessarily need the same treatment as your neighbor's. Some companies may offer a free lawn analysis. Make sure you are getting

*** Fast Facts ***

- Ask for recommendations from neighbors who have used lawn care services.
- Talk with representatives from several lawn care firms and get estimates.
- Check to see if the company you are interested in is licensed and certified.
- Find out if the company has liability insurance.
- Read your contract carefully.
- See if there are extra charges for special services.
- Find out if the work is guaranteed.

“custom” service.

- Even the best lawns have weeds and pests. Ask to see evidence of specific and real problems before you agree to any treatment.
- Check to see if the company is licensed and certified. All people who apply or supervise the application of pesticides as a business are commercial applicators and must be licensed and certified. Certification assures that the person applying pesticides is trained to handle and apply pesticides. To become certified, the applicator must pass a written exam given by the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection. Ask what specific lawn care training the employees have. You have the right to see the certification and license of the person who will be applying pesticides to your property.
- Check with our office, the Bureau of Consumer Protection and the Better Business Bureau to see if any complaints have been lodged against the company.
- Find out if the company has liability insurance to cover any accidents that might happen while work is being performed in your yard or while pesticides are being applied.
- Ask if the company belongs to a professional pest control

association. This membership may help keep members better trained and informed.

What should you look for in your contract?

If you select a lawn care service, you should put all your agreements with the company into a written contract. You may want to keep the following information in mind before you sign any contract.

- Read your contract carefully. Know what specific services and lawn problems are covered and what are not.
- See if there are extra charges for special services, such as fertilizing, disease control, or reseeding.
- Find out if the work is guaranteed. If it is, get the guarantee (or warranty) in writing. Know what the guarantee includes and excludes, and how long it lasts. For example, if you believe a seeding job produces little improvement, will the company come back and reseed for free during the same growing season?
- Know how long the services will be performed. Must you renew annually or are services scheduled indefinitely? What are the costs of renewal and how much might they increase? Many lawn care service contracts require written

notice to cancel. Find out how you cancel the contract you are considering.

If pesticide treatment is offered, what should you look for?

Lawn care companies often provide pest, disease, and weed control services. This usually means the company will use a pesticide on your lawn.

Pesticides are toxic chemicals used to destroy different kinds of lawn pests. For example, insecticides are used to kill bugs; herbicides kill weeds.

Lawn care companies generally maintain that the kind and strength of the pesticides they use are safe. Some organizations, however, including the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), have some health and safety concerns. Before you agree to pesticide treatment for your lawn, you may want to consider the following information.

- Although pesticides can kill unwanted weeds and bugs, the treatment also may destroy the organisms that create a healthy soil for your lawn. Some people feel that a lawn that is over-treated will become dependent on chemicals to thrive.
- If pesticides are going to be used on your lawn, find out

what specific lawn problems are being addressed.

- Before pesticides are applied to your property, you must be notified that you can receive pre-application information. If you request this information, it must be given in writing and include the following: 1) chemical or brand name of the pesticide, 2) the labels of the pesticides to be applied, 3) the date the application is to be made (may be given verbally if you approve) and 4) the address, telephone number, and contact person for the business. Ask to see the EPA label and read it carefully before any pesticide is applied to your lawn.
- Find out about the harmful characteristics of the pesticide, especially to those most vulnerable to its effects; young children, pregnant women, older people, and household pets.
- Inquire about the availability of less harmful compounds.
- Inquire carefully about the training of anyone who applies the pesticide to your lawn.
- Ask what kind of posting will be done to notify people in your neighborhood that pesticides are being applied to your lawn. The Department of Agriculture Trade and Consumer Protection administers the Landscape Pesticide

Application Advance Notification Registry which is a way for nearby renters and homeowners to be told in advance of landscape pesticide applications made to your property by professional lawn or landscape companies. The commercial companies should compare the addresses on the registry with their customer list before they make an application. If their customer's address is on the registry, the company must notify the person(s) listing that particular address before they apply landscape pesticides.

- Find out what you need to do during the pesticide treatment—and for how long. Should you stay indoors, keep your windows closed, bring in your outdoor lawn furniture and children's toys? How long should you stay off treated areas?
- Make sure pesticides are not applied in windy weather (over 10 miles an hour). This will prevent their spreading to other lawns.
- Ask for alternatives to pesticide applications. Many companies now offer a more "organic" and less chemical approach to lawn care.
- Ask about ecological effects, including danger to non-target species and the

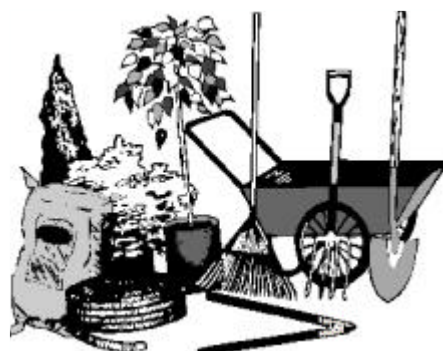
possibility of groundwater contamination.

Pesticide information at the time of application

If you contract for a pesticide application, the following information must be given to you by the pesticide applicator at the time of application:

- date and time of application
- applicator's name and license number
- applicator's telephone number or employer's telephone number
- chemical or brand name of the pesticide that was applied
- concentration and amount of pesticide applied or the amount of active ingredient per area treated
- notice that a copy of the pesticide label is available
- precautions you should take, such as when you can use the treated areas again.

Commercial applicators are required to post warning signs which state "Pesticide



Application, Please Keep Off.” Signs should remain in place at least until sunset of the day following the application.

When can the treated area be used again?

The information provided by the applicator at the time of application will tell you when you can use the treated area. **At a minimum, you should not enter a lawn that has been treated with pesticides until the sprays have dried.**

The labels of certain pesticides have specific re-entry intervals, which require a specific length of time, in hours or days, before the treated area can be entered. All areas treated with pesticides having a specific re-entry interval must be posted with warning signs that tell you when you may reuse the area. You may also refer to the information left by the commercial applicator for when a treated area may be used.

What are alternatives to pesticide controls?

Good-looking lawns may take a year or more of care to get that way. Although you may choose

to use chemical applications to quickly improve the appearance of your lawn, you also may want to consider longer-term approaches to lawn care that do not include pesticides.

One such approach is called “integrated pest management.” Basically, this involves planting several kinds of disease resistant grasses, properly conditioning your soil, and using new low-toxicity pest control materials.

For more information

For more information about integrated pest management, you may want to contact your local county extension agency. For more information about specific lawn care companies in your area, contact your local Better Business Bureau or The Bureau of Consumer Protection.

If you need information beyond that given on a pesticide label, you can call the National Pesticide Telecommunications Network at 1-800-858-7378.

The Agricultural Resource Management Division of the

Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection regulates the use of pesticides in Wisconsin. You can talk with pesticide experts and get answers to your questions about pesticides, pesticide laws or how to file a complaint concerning possible pesticide misuse by calling the Lawn care Hotline at (608)224-LAWN (608-224-5296) or (608)224-4500. Ask to talk with a pesticide specialist.

To report contract or guarantee (warranty) problems with a lawn service company or to check on the number of complaints contact the Bureau of Consumer Protection at:

(800) 422-7128

FAX: (608) 224-4939

TTY: (608) 224-5058

E-MAIL:
datcpholine@datcp.state.wi.us

WEBSITE:
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